

Story 2010 (1976 Tape 16)
[Retranslation of ATON #651]

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Province

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Padishah Hakan and the Guessing Children I¹

Once during “time within time,” when the “sieve was in the straw,”² there was a padishah named Hakan who had one thousand

¹ “The Guessing Children” is a generic title for two somewhat parallel sets of what could be called Turkish detective stories. The protagonists in these two cycles are usually boys or young men, but sometimes they are older men, like the dervishes of ATON 2010. Although they are called “Guessing Children” (“Zan Uşaklar” in parts of northern Turkey), their modus operandi is not a matter of guesswork. The protagonists of “Guessing Children I” derive the information they need from a type of geomancy, not by rational means. This is so with ATON 2010. The protagonists of “The Guessing Children II” derive their information from very sharp observation followed by deductive reasoning.

²This tale begins with two fragments of a long and well-known tekerleme, the formulaic introduction to a Turkish folktale. The tekerleme is a rimed nonsense-jingle filled with incongruities, paradoxes, non sequiturs, and word play. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a narrative is about to begin.

“Time within time” refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as “Frozen Time” or “Moments of Eternity.”

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gold paras³ stolen from his treasury. Hakan was very angry about this loss, and so he called together all those who worked in his palace: servants, attendants, laborers, cooks, and others. He said to them, “You must find the thief who stole a thousand gold paras from my treasury. If you fail to find that thief, I shall have my executioners behead all of you.”

All those gathered there before him said, “Our padishah, your words are our command. We shall do with pleasure what you have ordered.” Then they all left the palace and entered the streets, from which they searched the entire city, house by house, shop by shop. They were unable, however, to find the thief or thieves. After this fruitless search, while they were on their way back to the palace, they came upon two elderly dervishes.

The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

³The para was formerly the smallest monetary unit. There were 40 paras to the kuruş and 100 kuruş to the Turkish lira. By mid-20th century, devaluation of Turkish money had eliminated from use the para, and by the 1970s the kuruş also fell out of circulation. When the lira fell to the value of 1/10 of a U.S. cent (and much lower in the late 1980s), the kuruş became utterly meaningless. How much more so, then, was the para!

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The dervishes wondered about this group of people who were walking along with their heads bowed and with worried looks upon their faces. The dervishes stopped the group and asked, "What is wrong? What happened to all of you? Why do you seem so upset and frightened? May it all turn out well for you!"

People in the crowd answered, "A thousand golden paras from the treasury of our ruler, Hakan, have been stolen. He has ordered us to find the thief or thieves. If we cannot find the criminals, the padishah will order his executioners to behead all of us."

The dervishes responded, "You should calm down and relax! Don't worry at all, for we can find the culprits."

As if it were one voice, the group from the palace said all together, "May Allah bless you!" One of these dervishes was called Katlı Kulah and the other, Kesmi Silah.

The dervishes accompanied these people to Hakan's palace, where the elderly men were admitted to the presence of the padishah. They said to the ruler, "Our padishah, we shall find the thieves who robbed your treasury if you will permit us to do so. We shall start searching right away, and if we do not find the thieves, you may cut off our heads as well as those of the palace workers." The dervishes then left the palace and entered the main part of the town.

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When they were by themselves, the dervishes cast remil.⁴ Kathı Kulah asked, “Kesmi Silah, what do the signs say?”

Gerdan⁵ is the robber’s name.

He lived here in the nomad camp.

He’ll board a ship at Gıcırık Port.⁶

But although the dervishes rushed to the nomad camp at the edge of the city and then to Gıcırık Port, they were unable to find the thief. They concluded that he must have left those places already.

Not knowing which way to go now, they cast remil again. Then Kesmi Silah said, “Tell us, Kathı Kulah, what is the message now?”

Gerdan is the robber’s name.

⁴Remil is a Turkish form of geomancy. Several cubes—sometimes made of wood, sometimes of sheep knuckles—are coded on all six sides with numbers and/or letters and/or signs. After these have been cast upon the ground, the coded markings on the upturned sides are scrutinized carefully to see if the markings form any pattern of meaning. Usually they do seem to suggest some message, but if they do not, they are cast again. Remil is used both to predict the future and to acquire information about some event or situation elsewhere in the world in present time.

⁵Gerdan means neck or throat, but this odd name seems not to be involved in any wordplay.

⁶Although one can hardly imagine that the raw data provided by the cryptographic cubes are in verse, the interpretation of those data is invariably in metered, rhymed lines.

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He lived once in the nomad camp.
 He took a ship from Gıcırık.
 To solve the theft of Hakan's gold,
 Go to the Sea of Oman's⁷ shore.⁸

They also took passage on a ship and sailed to the shore of the Sea of Oman. They searched all along that shoreline, but nobody whom they met knew anything about Gerdan. Kathı Kulah cast remil and then asked Kesmi Silah, "Where do we go from here?"

Kesmi Silah stared for some time at the tokens and then said,

Gerdan is the robber's name.
 He lived once in the nomad camp.
 He took a ship from Gıcırık.
 To solve the theft of Hakan's gold,
 You reached the Sea of Oman's shore.
 He hides himself in Isfahan,⁹

⁷This is the Gulf of Oman, which is the entrance from the Arabian Sea into the Persian Gulf.

⁸The cumulative progression of remil messages pleases audiences, which sometimes repeat the lines along with the narrator.

⁹An ancient inland city in central Iran. It was once the capital of the country.

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In Takara Tukur Tandan ward.¹⁰

The dervishes found a small boat on the shore of the Sea of Oman and rowed several days northward until they came to the port nearest to Isfahan. They walked inland to that city, and after searching for only a short while, they found the mahalle of Takara Tukur Tandan. There they knocked on this door and they knocked on that door, but no one knew anything about a man named Gerdan. Kath Kulah cast remil and then asked, “Kesmi Silah, what additional information do the cubes give us?”

Gerdan is the robber’s name.

He lived once in the nomad camp.

He took a ship from Gıcırık.

To solve the theft of Hakan’s gold,

You reached the Sea of Oman’s shore.

He hides himself in Isfahan,

In Takara Tukur Tandan ward,

Where Handan is the robber’s wife.

¹⁰Mahalle, the usual Turkish word for ward, is too long to fit metrically into the English translation.

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With that clue, the dervishes began again to search the mahalle of Takara Tukuru Tandan. They asked everyone they met, “Can you tell us where Handan Hanım¹¹ lives?”

Near the end of the day an old man told them, “She lives in a large house in such and such a place.”

Going at once to that location, they knocked on the door. In those days comfortable houses had wooden balconies covered with wooden framework on the second floor. When she heard the knock below, Handan went out onto the balcony and asked, “Who is there? What do you want?”

The dervishes said, “Lady, will you please come down here?”

“All right,” she answered. She went downstairs, opened the door, and asked again, “What do you want?”

“In another country, ruled by a padishah named Hakan, the royal treasury was robbed of 1,000 gold paras. We wonder if the thief may be hiding in your house.”

“No, that is not true!” said Handan. “There is no thief hiding in this house!” She quickly tried to shut the door, but before she could do so, one of the dervishes stuck his foot in the opening and blocked any

¹¹Hanım means lady. In Turkish it follows a woman’s given name.

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movement of the door. As both dervishes then entered the house, Handan started screaming and shouting at them.

One of the dervishes said, "Please stop all that noise. We are not going to harm you in any way. We are simply going to search the house for the thief. If we do not find him, we shall leave very peaceably." They then proceeded to search all of the regular rooms, but they did not find Gerdan. When they went to the attic, however, they found the thief huddled down in a corner among some of the objects stored there.

Katlı Kulah went quickly to that corner, grabbed Gerdan by the ear, and took him to Kesmi Silah. "Give us the money, thief!" the dervishes said.

"I have no money, and I am not a thief," Gerdan answered.

"Come! Give us the money now or you will be in even greater trouble!"

"I have no money!"

Katlı Kulah again cast remil, and again he asked Kesmi Silah to read the signs.

Gerdan is the robber's name.

He lived once in the nomad camp.

He took a ship from Gıcırık.

To solve the theft of Hakan's gold,

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You reached the Sea of Oman's shore.

He hides himself in Isfahan,

In Takara Tukur Tandan ward,

Where Handan is the robber's wife.

Now take the money from his hat.

The thief was wearing a large turban. When the dervishes threw him down upon the floor, his turban fell off and the gold paras rolled out. When the dervishes counted the coins which had come from Gerdan's turban, they found only 999. "Where is the other gold para?" they demanded.

"I spent that one para for traveling expenses."

"No! You are lying!" said the dervishes. "Tell us where you have hidden that other gold para." But the thief remained silent.

Katli Kulah threw the cubes upon the floor, and Kesmi Silah read their message for the last time.

Gerdan is the robber's name.

He lived once in the nomad camp.

He took a ship from Gıcırık.

To solve the theft of Hakan's gold,

You reached the Sea of Oman's shore.

He hides himself in Isfahan,

In Takara Tukur Tandan ward,

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Where Handan is the robber's wife.

Now take the money from his hat.

Slap the back side of his head

To get the missing thousandth coin.

When the dervishes slapped the back of Gerdan's head, it caused him to cough, and as he did so, the coin which he had been hiding beneath his tongue popped out. After placing the 1,000 paras in a sturdy bag, they tied the arms of Gerdan and took him with them on their return to Hakan's land.

At the end of the long journey back, they finally reached the palace of the padishah, Hakan. When the dervishes and their captive were shown into the ruler's presence, Hakan was delighted to see them. He gave all of the gold to the two dervishes, and he ordered that Gerdan be executed.

All of them except the thief got what they wished and lived happily after that. May all of us have the same good fortune.